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Soviet Union Now Indirectly Assisting Iran

The Reagan administration's tilt toward Iraq in the 4-year-old Persian Gulf war may have driven Iran into the Kremlin's iron embrace.

More than a month ago, I reported that the Soviets were playing both ends against the middle in the Iraq-Iran conflict. According to intelligence sources, they sought to position themselves to play the "honest broker" and to ensure that any peace settlement would be to their advantage.

The Soviets pursued a two-faced policy, alternately aiding Iran, then Iraq, now Iran again. There is reason to believe that the covert U.S. support of Iraq was the catalyst that brought Iran and the Soviet Union together again. This much is certain: the Kremlin has indirectly resumed large-scale military aid to Iran.

Intelligence sources told my associate Lucette Lagnado that the Iranians have been getting major arms shipments from such Soviet-bloc suppliers as Bulgaria and North Korea. Obviously, this could not have happened without Moscow's sanction.

It appears likely that the Korean

munitions originated in the Soviet Union. According to intelligence sources, a North Korean munitions factory on the 10-mile border with the U.S.S.R. exists solely to put its stamp on Soviet-made weapons.

Iranian diplomats in recent months have been visiting eastern European countries secretly, not only to make arms deals but to ask Soviet satellites to intercede for Iran in Moscow. They seem to have succeeded on both.

During June, for example, the State Department received reports of huge shipments of ammunition to Tehran from Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. The No. 3 man in the Iranian Foreign Ministry recently went to Moscow, where he was reportedly granted an hour-long meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko.

In addition, a top Soviet energy official visited Tehran, apparently to discuss mutually beneficial economic deals. One possibility is an agreement under which the Soviets would supply electric power, which Iran badly needs, in return for shipments of natural gas.

While the Soviets are mending their fences with the anti-American regime in Tehran, they are also making brazen overtures to one of our oldest friends in the Middle East: Jordan. A high-level Soviet delegation visited Amman to dicker with King Hussein over missiles he is determined to buy from one source or another.

Hussein had been playing his "Kremlin card" in hopes of scaring the Reagan administration into supplying him with Stinger missiles.

The president's advisers are split over how to respond to the Soviet-Jordanian arms negotiations. Some want to offer Hussein U.S. missiles to keep him out of the Kremlin's clutches. Others, presumably mindful of what such a decision could cost Reagan in an election year, say they think Hussein is bluffing. They recommend doing nothing.